

MARINE ELECTRONICS ROUNDUP

The experts share their picks for the most
exciting new electronics of 2015

BY JEFF COTE
Pacific Yacht Systems

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We hope you had a chance to get out and enjoy last year's boating season. With the mild fall and warmer temperatures, it looks like we will be experiencing yet another amazing summer. Already this year we have noticed that boaters are starting the season much earlier and we have been kept busy with new electronic installations.

One of the biggest advancements in technology

we have seen recently is in the sounder market. There has been an explosion of products that allow us to see the bottom of the ocean in new and impressive ways. Garmin and Simrad were among the first to introduce CHIRP (compressed high-intensity radar pulse) to the recreational marine market back in 2010. This transducer technology, which had been around for years in military and commercial applications, sends out a continuous sweep of frequencies as compared to just one single frequency. It's like switching from analog to HD.

For years, manufacturers have offered down-imaging sounders, commonly referred to as fishfinders. Now we have new technologies that provide side-imaging and even forward-imaging. The picture on the screen looks like an ultrasound image and reveals lifelike views of vegetation, rocks, sand, fish, and even outcroppings that do not appear on traditional charts. In the past, the actual black box was commonly installed separately from the MFD, now many units come with the sounder processor built-in, taking up less space, less wiring

and less setup.

Another progression we have noticed is the fit and finish of the new multi-function displays. Most manufacturers have introduced a glass bridge style that is really stunning and was not available on non-flagship units. Also, two or three years ago, manufacturers started introducing products with built-in wifi, Bluetooth and NMEA 2000, now, pretty much every product includes some of these modern-day connectivity features.

It's a great time to buy new electronics, here are a few of our favourite products for 2015.

ICOM M506

The Icom M506 is a fixed mount VHF and AIS Receiver Combo with NMEA 2000 connectivity. The IC-M506 can receive and transmit GPS, speed, AIS, DSC call information and transmit radio frequency and PGN list data on the network. As an added benefit to boaters using both NMEA0183 and NMEA2000 devices, the IC-M506 includes a built-in converter to translate NMEA 0183 GPS data to NMEA 2000 data for other equipment through the N2K bus. This unit includes last call voice recording, which allows you to replay the last transmission in case it wasn't fully understood the first time. It also has the ability to connect to a 25-watt external hailer and a built-in horn. This radio is really best in category for options and pricing. ▶





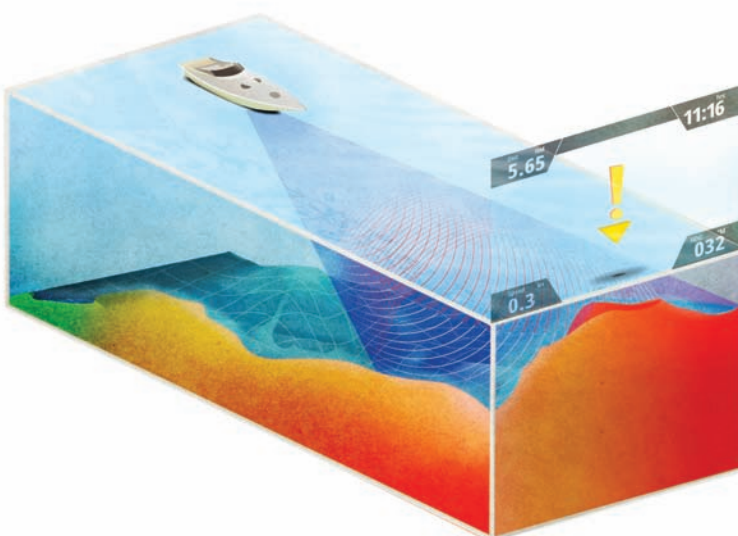
RAYMARINE DRAGONFLY 7 SONAR GPS

Another fishfinder/GPS chartplotter navigation combo designed just for anglers is the Raymarine Dragonfly 7 Sonar GPS. Last year we featured the Dragonfly 5 and noted that it had a 5.7-inch screen, which made the split screen quite small, this latest version has a seven-inch screen, which has photo-like imagery of the bottom structure using CHIRP DownVision. The Dragonfly 5 was only available with a transom mount transducer but the Dragonfly 7 now offers a transom mount, trolling motor and thru-hull transducer.

This unit does not include a touch screen, radar or networking capabilities but it does work with the Wi-Fish DownVision Sonar Module, which allows you to pause, zoom and rewind the sonar on your smartphone. Like the Lowrance Mark-4, the Dragonfly 7 uses Navionics on a built-in, waterproof microSD card slot.

B & G FORWARDSCAN WITH SONARHUB

If you have ever wondered "how deep is the water ahead of my boat" or "are there any below the water obstacles in front of my boat" then the B&G ForwardScan with SonarHub is for you. ForwardScan provides boaters with an extra level of confidence when boating or anchoring in unfamiliar waters and provides 2D images of the water and bottom structure ahead. The system has a Heading Line View that uses a colour-coded system to illustrate shallow, medium and deep water. The images can also be viewed on a smartphone or tablet using the Simrad or B&G GoFree wifi system.





LOWRANCE MARK-4

If you are an angler looking for an inexpensive, space saving fishfinder and chartplotter, then look no further than the Lowrance Mark-4. It is a compact, dual frequency 83/200 kHz, dual-function fishfinder and chartplotter with a 3.5-inch screen. It ships with a low-profile, high-speed, transom-mount Skimmer transducer with a built-in temperature sensor as well as a trolling motor-mount bracket option. It is pre-loaded with a detailed basemap that is compatible with Fishing Hotspots Pro, Navionics Gold and Premium, which can be upgraded through the built-in, waterproof microSD card slot.



BAROPLUG

Unlike temperature or wind, you cannot tell whether you are experiencing high or low pressure with one of your five senses. New from LCJCapteurs, the BaroPlug is a plug and play barometer for NMEA 2000 instruments. It features a micro plug and LED indicator that connects directly to the NMEA backbone allowing the atmospheric pressure to be shown on any compatible display. ▶

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FURUNO 1ST WATCH WIRELESS RADAR

Earlier this year, we wrote about the Furuno 1st Watch Wireless Radar. We don't believe it is a direct replacement for traditional radar because it cannot be integrated with your existing multifunction display, it can only be displayed on an iProduct or iOS device. Because these devices are not designed for marine applications and do not fare very well in the rain, they should not be your only means of navigation. That being said, this radar is great for boaters who don't have a display that is radar compatible or don't want the hassle of running cable from the radar to the multifunction display.

GARMIN HELM

Garmin Helm is a free app that allows you to view and control your compatible Garmin chartplotter, with built-in wifi, from an iProduct or Android. If you wish to pair it with a unit that does not have built-in wifi, you can purchase a Garmin Marine Wi-Fi adapter, which is sold separately. ▶



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FLIR ONE PERSONAL THERMAL IMAGER

At first glance we weren't sure if the Flir One Personal Thermal Imager was something boaters would embrace but it didn't take long for it to become one of our favourite products of the year. It actually transforms your smartphone into a personal thermal imaging device. The first thought is that it could be used to locate a person in the water, in the dark and at very close proximity, but the applications for this product are overwhelming. You can spot overloaded electrical connections at the source, check coolant and exhaust systems, locate heat exchanger leaks, check water heater and furnace efficiency, locate heat dissipation through windows, locate pipes behind walls and under floors, pinpoint leaks or blockages without cutting holes in the wall, see moisture build-up that the naked eye cannot or potential leaks in ceilings, walls and floors before mold starts. You can even use it to find insects or rodents on board, observe wild animals at night, ensure your campfire is extinguished or locate fresh pet stains on the carpet. It retails for about \$250 but isn't available in Canada yet.



FUSION BB300

If your helm is low on space but your entertainments needs are high, check out the Fusion BB300 Black Box Entertainment System with Fusion-link. This is a true plug and play entertainment system designed for space-limited installations. Fusion developed the Simrad SonicHub in 2010, followed by the Garmin Meteor 300 in 2013 and then Garmin purchased Fusion last May. The BB300 is similar to the Meteor 300, which was designed to work with some non-Garmin displays over NMEA 2000, but the BB300 uses N2K Fusion-Link integration to work with MFDs from Lowrance, Simrad, B&G, Humminbird as well as Garmin. It offers full support for smartphones, USB, auxiliary and Bluetooth as well as offering three different audio zones with their own volume control options.



SIMRAD IS35

The Simrad IS35 digital colour instrument display offers a smart interface to engine data, fuel economy, depth history, steering and can even monitor up to two engines per gauge. When connected to a NMEA 2000 network, the IS35 automatically detects other connecting equipment eliminating a complicated and time-consuming setup process. This unit is similar to the Garmin GMI12 and the Raymarine i70. While we recommend keeping with the same manufacturer to reduce compatibility issues, many of these instrument displays will work with other manufacturers connected to a NMEA backbone.



MARETRON'S N2K VIEW

Maretron's N2K View is a comprehensive boat monitoring and control software that can be viewed while underway on a Maretron (TSM800C/TSM1330C) display remotely on your home or office computer, or on your mobile device using N2KView Mobile. The software allows you to create your own screen layout choosing the items you would like to monitor, it even lets you colour code the gauges so you know when things are within limits and when they are not. If there is a warning or alarm, the system will notify you. Cameras can also be added as part of the monitoring system so you can view the engine room or as part of the security system. ▶

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GARMIN GPSMAP 7607XSV

The Garmin GPSMAP 7607xsv is a multi-touch widescreen chartplotter/sonar combination with a brilliant seven-inch screen. It comes with built-in one kW dual CHIRP DownVu and SideVu scanning sonar that provides nearly photographic images of fish and structures.

With the use of the optional BlueChart G2 vision SD card, you can add a 3D perspective to charts above and below the waterline as well as high resolution satellite images. It also incorporates auto guidance technology, that allows you to choose a destination and it will automatically create a route that avoids obstacles, shallow water and obstructions.

This unit supports NMEA 2000, radar, autopilot, multiple screens, FUSION-Link entertainment systems, thermal cameras and is Bluetooth and wifi compatible.



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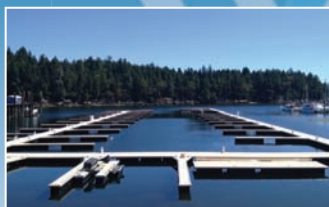
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RAYMARINE RAY70

Another radio that is getting a lot of attention this year is the Raymarine RAY70, a fixed or flush mount all-in-one VHF, AIS receiver, loudhailer and intercom. It integrates with Raymarine multifunction displays using both NMEA 0183 or 2000. It will also accommodate an optional second station kit, allowing full access to all of the VHF capabilities from a second location as well as the convenience of station-to-station intercom calling between the handset and the main radio. This feature is especially useful for boats with an upper and lower helm. ▶

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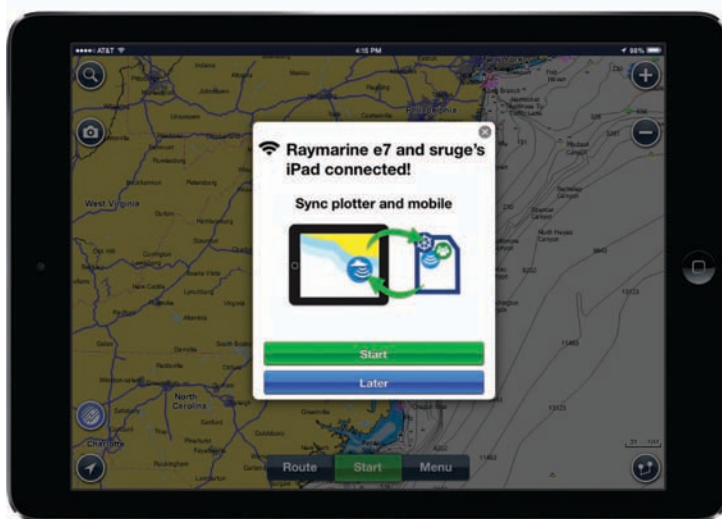


GARMIN REACTOR AUTOPILOT

A great add on to the GPSMAP 700 series is the Garmin Reactor Autopilot, set to launch in the spring of 2015. One of our favourite options is that it allows you to automatically disengage the autopilot with a turn of the helm allowing for quick manoeuvring without fumbling for a switch or MFD control. Another great feature is that the autopilot can be engaged to follow patented Garmin Auto Guidance technology that allows you to enter a destination and your chartplotter will search the relevant charts and create a safe route. It also boasts a streamlined installation process utilizing an autopilot blackbox that can be mounted in any orientation, almost anywhere on your boat.

NAVIONICS PLOTTER SYNC APP

Designed exclusively for Raymarine, the Navionics Plotter Sync App allows you to connect a Raymarine multifunction display to Navionics servers wirelessly on the internet. You can then update your charts and upload your sonar logs while on your boat. You no longer have to remove the Navionics card or use a computer, as the app does it automatically. Plotter Sync currently connects with Raymarine a, c and e series equipped with wifi. You will always have the most accurate and up-to-date charts available. 



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